YOUTH HUNTING REPORT

The Success of Youth Recruitment

The Impact of Youth Hunting Restrictions

The Future of Hunting, Conservation and the Shooting Sports Industry

The Safety Record of Youth Hunters

Research compiled by

Silvertip Productions, Southwick Associates and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance

for the

National Shooting Sports Foundation

and

National Wild Turkey Federation

Introduction

There is a growing concern about the ability to increase youth participation in hunting. These concerns are shared by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA). It is the position of the three organizations that recruitment efforts are hampered by state laws and regulations that restrict youth hunting. This position is reinforced by the findings reported in this paper.

It is the intent of the three organizations to educate the general public, elected officials and sportsmen about the need to lower barriers to youth hunting. Further, the organizations are launching a campaign to work in the states with local sportsmen to enact legislation or regulations to achieve that goal.

Purpose of this Report

This report examines the success of youth recruitment, compares the impact of youth hunting restrictions, projects future hunting numbers, and looks at safety statistics for youth hunters. The majority of the research was compiled by Silvertip Productions. Projections on hunting numbers and expenditures were provided by Southwick Associates, Inc. The report was written by USSA, Silvertip and Southwick. The findings were peer reviewed for statistical validity by the Triad Research Group. The research was funded by NSSF. The project, Families Afield, is a collaborative effort between NSSF, NWTF and USSA.

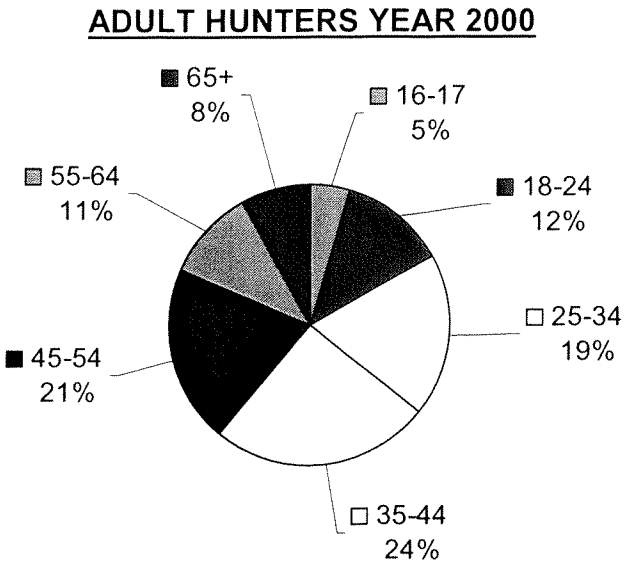
Finding #1: The Need For Aggressive Recruitment Is Urgent

While all agree that youth recruitment efforts must increase, the time to act is now. The reason: hunters ages 35-54. This segment of hunters represents a disproportionate share of the U.S. hunting population (45.8%). The younger age segments are considerably smaller. If attracting new hunters is indeed a high priority, it is imperative to take advantage of this large group of hunters.

Why are 35-54 year old hunters so important? People in this age group are more likely to have children that are old enough to introduce to hunting and mentor them throughout their youth. For this report, this group will be called the *teaching class*.

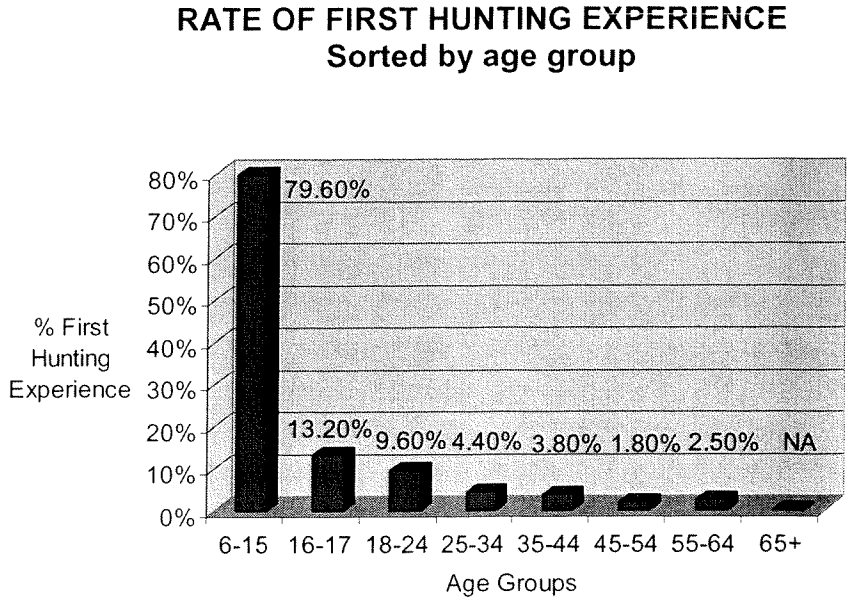
The 25-34 year old age group is 25 percent smaller than the 35-44 year old group. In other words, the *teaching class* of tomorrow will be significantly smaller than the current group. Fewer teachers will result in fewer pupils.

What these statistics tell us is that steps must be taken now to maximize future hunter numbers or even hold the line on current numbers.



Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001)

Youth must continue to be the primary focus of hunter recruitment efforts. This is the age group when the overwhelming majority of first time hunting experiences take place.



Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001)

Growth Rates by Age Groups

Hunter numbers in general have fallen over the past 15 years in every age category except 65+. Participation rates are declining the fastest in the youngest age groups.

AGE	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE, 1985-2001
16-17	-2.77%
18-24	-3.50%
25-34	-2.60%
35-44	-1.89%
45-54	-1.31%
55-64	-0.42%
65 Plus	0.18%
TOTAL	**-2.27%**

Source: Southwick Associates, Inc. (2005)

Finding #2: Youth Participation Rates Are Not Keeping Pace

There are strong indicators that youth participation rates will not be sufficient to replace current hunters.

At the age of 16, most states allow youth to hunt with the same privileges as adults provided they complete a hunter education course and purchase a license. For that reason, youth hunters will be defined as a hunter between the ages of six and 15.

National Figures

4.23 percent of Americans age 6-15 hunted in 2000.

6.15 percent of Americans 16 + hunted in 2000.

Dividing the youth participation percentage by the adult participation percentage provides a ratio of the total population of youth who hunted compared to the total population of adults who hunted during the year 2000. We call the resultant number the national hunter replacement ratio.

While current data is insufficient to pinpoint a ratio that will sustain the current numbers of hunters into the future, we believe that a ratio higher than 1.0 is needed for the following reasons:

- Most adult hunters started hunting at a very young age.
- New adult hunters are more likely to desert hunting.
- Demographics point to an aging population: populations of younger Americans are smaller, so even if we maintain the same percentage of youth compared to adults, total numbers of hunters will likely drop.
- Some youth become temporary or permanent dropouts when they go to college, join the armed services, or move away from home.

The national hunter replacement ratio for 2000 is .69.

State by State

We then sorted the results by state.

- State ratios ranged from .26 – 1.16.
- Seven states are performing at a level above one.
- Eleven states are at a level of .9 or above.

State By State Hunter Replacement Ratios-2000

State	Population Ages 6 - 15	Hunters Ages 6 - 15	Percent Hunters	Population Ages 16+	Hunters Ages 16+	Percent Hunters	Hunter Replacement Ratio
Missouri	809,000	92,000	11.37%	4,206,000	413,000	9.82%	1.16
Oklahoma	498,000	51,000	10.24%	2,587,000	241,000	9.32%	1.10
New Hampshire	182,000	11,000	6.04%	954,000	53,000	5.56%	1.09
Rhode Island	144,000	2,000	1.39%	765,000	10,000	1.31%	1.06
Delaware	106,000	3,000	2.83%	599,000	16,000	2.67%	1.06
Arizona	806,000	28,000	3.47%	3,700,000	124,000	3.35%	1.04
Mississippi	438,000	54,000	12.33%	2,111,000	257,000	12.17%	1.01
Alabama	618,000	56,000	9.06%	3,427,000	316,000	9.22%	0.98
West Virginia	233,000	37,000	15.88%	1,447,000	235,000	16.24%	0.98
Indiana	874,000	51,000	5.84%	4,558,000	284,000	6.23%	0.94
Florida	2,159,000	43,000	1.99%	12,171,000	270,000	2.22%	0.90
Illinois	1,833,000	60,000	3.27%	9,244,000	340,000	3.68%	0.89
Maryland	778,000	21,000	2.70%	4,078,000	124,000	3.04%	0.89
Iowa	413,000	33,000	7.99%	2,201,000	203,000	9.22%	0.87
California	5,239,000	46,000	0.88%	25,982,000	277,000	1.07%	0.82
Tennessee	790,000	48,000	6.08%	4,317,000	320,000	7.41%	0.82
Vermont	83,000	10,000	12.05%	479,000	75,000	15.66%	0.77
Georgia	1,224,000	58,000	4.74%	6,096,000	377,000	6.18%	0.77
North Carolina	1,171,000	47,000	4.01%	5,918,000	314,000	5.31%	0.76
Ohio	1,637,000	69,000	4.22%	8,645,000	482,000	5.58%	0.76
Texas	3,276,000	175,000	5.34%	15,445,000	1,126,000	7.29%	0.73
South Dakota	112,000	13,000	11.61%	559,000	90,000	16.10%	0.72
Kansas	392,000	28,000	7.14%	2,017,000	202,000	10.01%	0.71
Colorado	623,000	23,000	3.69%	3,215,000	168,000	5.23%	0.71
Virginia	977,000	38,000	3.89%	5,471,000	309,000	5.65%	0.69
Kentucky	557,000	32,000	5.75%	3,121,000	273,000	8.75%	0.66
Wyoming	71,000	8,000	11.27%	377,000	65,000	17.24%	0.65
Hawaii	160,000	2,000	1.25%	916,000	18,000	1.97%	0.64
South Carolina	553,000	26,000	4.70%	3,080,000	232,000	7.53%	0.62
Pennsylvania	1,656,000	96,000	5.80%	9,303,000	867,000	9.32%	0.62
New Mexico	285,000	15,000	5.26%	1,337,000	114,000	8.53%	0.62
Nebraska	248,000	15,000	6.05%	1,266,000	128,000	10.11%	0.60
Alaska	112,000	11,000	9.82%	454,000	75,000	16.52%	0.59
Utah	384,000	26,000	6.77%	1,554,000	178,000	11.45%	0.59
Minnesota	733,000	68,000	9.28%	3,688,000	582,000	15.78%	0.59
Maine	170,000	12,000	7.06%	1,005,000	123,000	12.24%	0.58
Montana	132,000	18,000	13.64%	699,000	171,000	24.46%	0.56
New York	2,597,000	65,000	2.50%	14,201,000	642,000	4.52%	0.55
New Jersey	1,192,000	13,000	1.09%	6,300,000	125,000	1.98%	0.55
North Dakota	89,000	9,000	10.11%	483,000	92,000	19.05%	0.53
Wisconsin	778,000	60,000	7.71%	4,059,000	591,000	14.56%	0.53
Massachusetts	848,000	7,000	0.83%	4,837,000	78,000	1.61%	0.51
Arkansas	373,000	28,000	7.51%	1,999,000	309,000	15.46%	0.49
Connecticut	478,000	4,000	0.84%	2,536,000	46,000	1.81%	0.46
Washington	869,000	20,000	2.30%	4,516,000	231,000	5.12%	0.45
Louisiana	677,000	27,000	3.99%	3,306,000	314,000	9.50%	0.42
Idaho	206,000	13,000	6.31%	972,000	151,000	15.53%	0.41
Oregon	476,000	15,000	3.15%	2,630,000	235,000	8.94%	0.35
Nevada	302,000	3,000	0.99%	1,454,000	48,000	3.30%	0.30
Michigan	1,498,000	37,000	2.47%	7,587,000	725,000	9.56%	0.26
Totals	40,859,000	1,727,000	4.23%	211,872,000	13,039,000	6.15%	0.69

Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001)

Finding #3: Youth Recruitment Is Less Successful In States With Higher Youth Hunting Restrictions

We classified all 50 states according to the level of restrictions on youth hunting opportunities. Criteria included the age at which youth may hunt and hunter education requirements. Due to the shift over the years from small game hunting to big game hunting, we weighed heavily whether or not youth are permitted to hunt big game. Because of the population shift from rural to urban areas, access to public land was also weighed heavily. The states are placed in three categories: very restrictive states, somewhat restrictive states and least restrictive states.

We then sorted the states into the three categories and examined their hunter replacement ratios.

Very Restrictive States

Twenty states have very restrictive regulations or laws. These restrictions include minimum age requirements for youth hunting for those under 13 and high hunter education requirements before most participation is permitted.

Sixteen of the 20 states performed at a level lower than the .69 national average.

Rating (Regs)	State	Ratio
Very Restrictive	Rhone Island	1.06
Very Restrictive	California	0.82
Very Restrictive	South Dakota	0.72
Very Restrictive	Colorado	0.71
Very Restrictive	Wyoming	0.65
Very Restrictive	Pennsylvania	0.62
Very Restrictive	Nebraska	0.60
Very Restrictive	Utah	0.59
Very Restrictive	Maine	0.58
Very Restrictive	Montana	0.56
Very Restrictive	New York	0.55
Very Restrictive	New Jersey	0.55
Very Restrictive	North Dakota	0.53
Very Restrictive	Wisconsin	0.53
Very Restrictive	Massachusetts	0.51
Very Restrictive	Connecticut	0.46
Very Restrictive	Idaho	0.41
Very Restrictive	Oregon	0.35
Very Restrictive	Nevada	0.30
Very Restrictive	Michigan	0.26
Subtotals		0.53

Somewhat Restrictive States

Thirteen states have some restrictive regulations or laws. These include requiring hunter education certification prior to permitting many youth hunting opportunities.

Five of the 13 states performed at a rate lower than the national average.

Rating (Regs)	State	Ratio
Somewhat Restrictive	Delaware	1.06
Somewhat Restrictive	Arizona	1.04
Somewhat Restrictive	Indiana	0.94
Somewhat Restrictive	Illinois	0.89
Somewhat Restrictive	Maryland	0.89
Somewhat Restrictive	Ohio	0.76
Somewhat Restrictive	Kansas	0.71
Somewhat Restrictive	Virginia	0.69
Somewhat Restrictive	Kentucky	0.66
Somewhat Restrictive	Hawaii	0.64
Somewhat Restrictive	South Carolina	0.62
Somewhat Restrictive	New Mexico	0.62
Somewhat Restrictive	Minnesota	0.59
Subtotals		0.74

Least Restrictive States

Seventeen states have regulations or laws that 1) permit youth hunting largely at the parents' discretion and 2) hunter education requirements that largely permit youth participation before passing hunter education tests.

Only four of the 17 performed at a lower rate than the national average.

Rating (Regs)	State	Ratio
Least Restrictive	Missouri	1.16
Least Restrictive	Oklahoma	1.10
Least Restrictive	New Hampshire	1.09
Least Restrictive	Mississippi	1.01
Least Restrictive	Alabama	0.98
Least Restrictive	West Virginia	0.98
Least Restrictive	Florida	0.90
Least Restrictive	Iowa	0.87
Least Restrictive	Tennessee	0.82
Least Restrictive	Vermont	0.77
Least Restrictive	Georgia	0.77
Least Restrictive	North Carolina	0.76
Least Restrictive	Texas	0.73
Least Restrictive	Alaska	0.59
Least Restrictive	Arkansas	0.49
Least Restrictive	Washington	0.45
Least Restrictive	Louisiana	0.42
Subtotals		0.80

Summary

The average hunter replacement ratios for least restrictive states and somewhat restrictive states are .80 and .74. The ratio for restrictive states is .53.

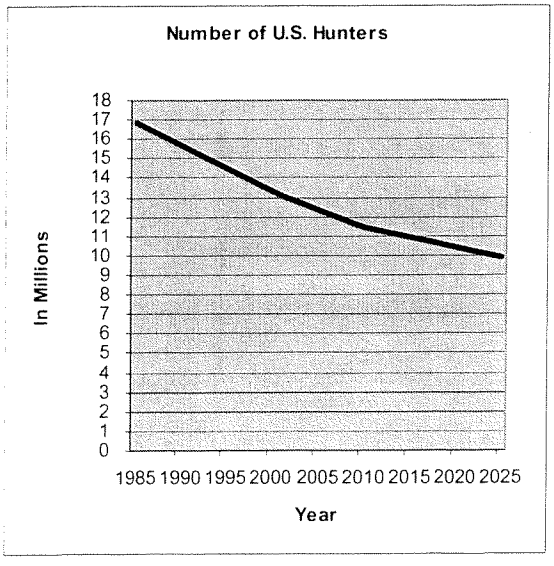
- Four of the seven states performing at a ratio above 1.0 are least restrictive states.
- Two of the seven are somewhat restrictive states.
- Twelve of the 15 worst performing states were classified as very restrictive.

Clearly regulations that limit youth participation have an impact on a state's ability to attract new hunters.

Restrictions on youth hunting are not the only variable that may affect a state's hunter replacement ratio. Urbanization and access to public land are also barriers among others.

Barriers must be lowered to facilitate youth participation. Lowering or eliminating youth restrictions are an area where this goal is attainable.

Finding #4: Without Changes, The Future of Hunting is Bleak



Source: Southwick Associates, Inc. (2005)

Unless changes are made to address poor hunting replacement numbers, the future of hunting, conservation, and the shooting sports industry is in jeopardy.

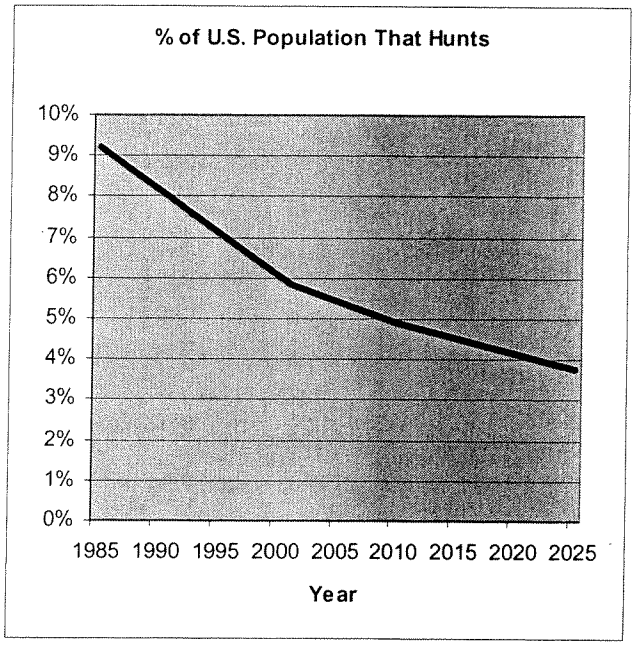
Hunter Numbers

The overall hunter population peaked in the mid 1980s with 16.8 million in 1985. By 2001, hunter populations had dropped 23 percent. By 2025 numbers are expected to drop another 24 percent to 9.9 million.

Hunters as a Percentage of U.S. Population

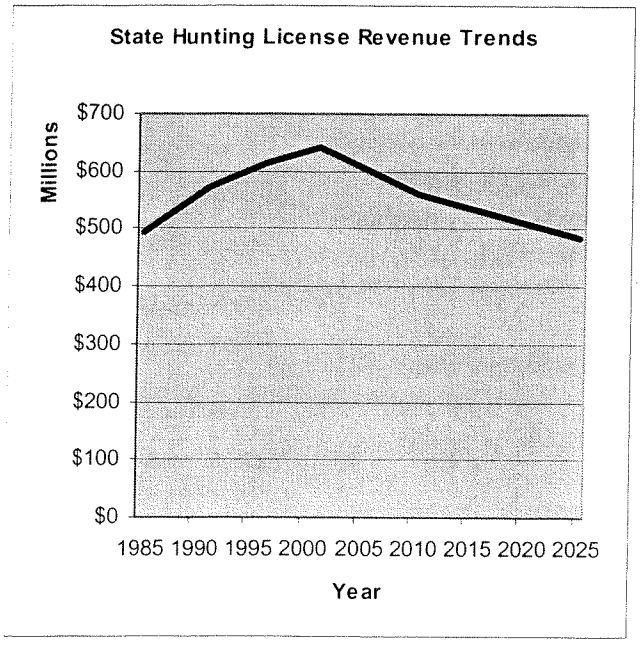
This chart shows the percent of the U.S. population that is projected to hunt. In 1985 9.23 percent of Americans hunted. By 2001 it had dropped to 5.85 percent. Projections indicate that it will drop to 3.78 percent by 2025.

The decrease of hunters as a percentage of the population bodes ill for the future of hunting. Politically, numbers make the difference. Elected officials, the large majority of whom do not hunt, have been reluctant to challenge hunting in many instances for fear of alienating such a large potential voting bloc. As the hunting demographic decreases as a percentage of U.S. population, so does the political strength that has been key to its defense.



Source: Southwick Associates, Inc. (2005)

The Impact on Conservation

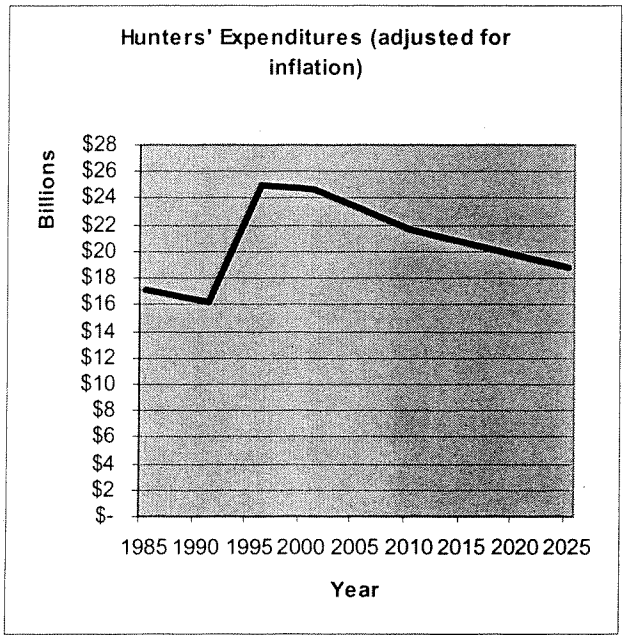


Source: Southwick Associates, Inc. (2005)

If state wildlife management agencies are unable to implement additional means of collecting increased revenues from hunters, their long term revenues are expected to decrease as hunter numbers decrease. A trend towards increased prices and specialty licenses from 1985 to 2001 were the suspected driving force behind revenue increases during that time frame. By 2025, revenues could drop 25 percent compared to 2001 levels, thus impairing wildlife management efforts. The effects will be magnified beyond the simple percentage change in revenues because of increased workload demands on state wildlife agencies, and increased personnel, land and regulatory costs.

The Impact on the Hunting Economy

Basically, any given industry can only squeeze a limited amount of revenues per customer. This chart represents recent and expected future trends regarding hunter expenditures. From 1991 through 2001, an expanding economy and a trend towards increased purchases of specialized, higher-priced items actually increased hunters' dollars while the number of hunters decreased. This trend is not expected to continue. By 2025 expenditures are expected to decrease 24 percent from 2001 levels, impacting sales and earnings for nearly all companies in the hunting industry.



Source: Southwick Associates, Inc. (2005)

Finding #5: Hunting Is Safe

For some members of the public and opinion leaders (elected officials and media) however, the question about youth hunting is safety. Before hunters, the public or elected officials will consider lowering these barriers, they must be assured that youth hunters are safe.

Statistically, the numbers of people injured or killed in hunting-related shooting incidents are similar to the number of people injured or killed by lightning strikes.

In the year 2000, hunters enjoyed over 243 million days of hunting. In 2002, forty-five states reported 623 non-fatal hunting related shooting incidents and 66 fatalities. The International Hunter Education Association estimates approximately 700 non-fatal injuries, and 75 fatal shootings occurred in 2002 if non-reporting states were included. This provides an estimate of one non-fatal injury for roughly every 347,000 days of hunting activity, and a shooting fatality rate of one for every 3.2 million days of hunting.

Few sports or other forms of outdoor recreation can match this record of safety. It is a testament to the passionate focus hunters and wildlife agencies have placed on hunter safety in the last 50 years.

The relative risks of all sports injuries compared to hunting is illustrated in A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF SPORTS INJURIES IN THE U.S. published by American Sports Data, Inc. This extensive study examined more than 100 sports and activities. Hunting ranked 29 on the list in terms of injuries per 100 participants.

Rank	Sport/Activity	Injuries per 100 Participants
1	Football (Tackle)	18.8
2	Ice Hockey	15.9
3	Boxing	12.7
5	Soccer	9.3
6	Cheerleading	9.0
7	Basketball	7.6
10	Baseball	5.8
14	Football (Touch)	4.4
16	Volleyball	3.1
21	Tennis	2.5
24	Horseback Riding	1.8
25	Aerobics	1.7
28	Roller Hockey	1.3
29	Hunting	1.3
30	Mountain/Rock Climbing	1.2

Source: A comprehensive study of sports injuries in the U.S. (2002)

Even when factoring in all injuries that occur during hunting such as twisted ankles, cuts, broken bones etc., hunting is remarkably safe. In 2002, the researchers reported 207,000 injuries during 250 million days of hunting (a rate of one injury for every 1,207 days of hunting).

Finding #6: Youth Hunters Are Safe Hunters

Experienced hunters know that hunting is a safe activity but most are diligent in their efforts to make it even safer. All 50 states and all Canadian provinces offer hunter safety education programs. Nearly 70,000 adults volunteer time to help agencies teach basic and advanced courses. The National Shooting Sports Foundation reports that hunting related shooting incidents have declined by 31 percent in the last 10 years.

Youth hunters are indeed safe. In 2002, with 1.7 million young hunters spending over 15.3 million days in the field, there were 77 hunting related shooting incidents reported.

This information is backed up by comments returned to Timothy J. Lawhern, the Hunter Education Administrator with the Bureau of Law Enforcement, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lawhern surveyed state wildlife agencies about youth hunting ages and found that thirty-five states permitted some hunting before age twelve. Thirty-four of the thirty-five agencies responded that they had no safety concerns.

Supervised youth hunters have a remarkable safety record.

Further analysis of youth hunting shooting incidents shows that the major factor affecting youth hunting safety is the presence of an attentive, responsible adult hunter to supervise youth. Most of the 2002 incidents happened in the absence of an adult supervisor, or during a lapse in the adult supervision. With 1.7 million young hunters spending more than 15 million days in the field, the number of hunting related shooting incidents dropped to 20 when the hunter was supervised.

Recommendation:

It is the conclusion of NWTF, NSSF and USSA that barriers must be lowered to facilitate more youth participation. The three organizations recommend that all states examine the institutional impediments that may prevent increases in youth participation. In the short term, efforts will be implemented to address the states in which the hunter replacement ratio is alarmingly low.

It is our strong conviction that permitting parents to decide at what age their children can hunt, and permitting youth to participate in hunting before obtaining a hunter education certificate will result in positive gains.

Sources:

National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001) - U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. Youth data collected via screening survey. Adult data based on full survey.

Compilation of State Youth Hunting Laws and Regulations. (2004) - Specifically youth hunting ages and hunter education requirements. U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance and Silvertip Productions, Ltd.

A Comprehensive Study Of Sports Injuries in the U.S. (2002) - Published by American Sports Data, Inc. American Sports Data, Inc. (ASD) is a specialist in consumer survey research for the sporting goods, fitness and health club industries.

The Hunter Incident Clearinghouse (data from 2002) - A project of the International Hunter Education Association in association with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Wildlife Restoration Act, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Wild Turkey Federation, Silvertip Productions, Ltd.

The Future of Hunting [projections on hunting numbers and the hunting economy.] (2005) - Southwick Associates for U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance.

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